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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [SOCI](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN: TRIBAL CLASHES WITH POLICE ERUPT IN MA'AN

REF: A. AMMAN 2451
[1](#)B. AMMAN 1896
[1](#)C. AMMAN 1749
[1](#)D. AMMAN 1746
[1](#)E. AMMAN 858

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In response to the death of a local resident due to police abuse, rioters fired upon policemen and set ablaze police property in the East Bank tribal town of Ma'an on November 14. Ma'an is viewed as a bellwether for East Bank opinion and has a history of riots in protest of government policies. The Ma'an riot occurred one week after riots and gunshots were fired at security personnel in eastern Amman after a similar death resulting from alleged police abuse (ref A). Similar to the East Amman riot, senior government officials were slow to publicly respond to the incident. In the course of an interview on another topic, the Minister of Interior responded to press questions about violent outbreaks generally without specifically mentioning either the East Amman or Ma'an riots. He confirmed that the police respect the rule of law, investigate and prosecute officers accused of abuse, and that these violent outbreaks often produce victims on both sides. He added that isolated incidents should not be seen as a reflection on Jordan's security and stability as a whole. However, he then externalized the issue by accusing "non-citizen instigators who are known to us" of waging regular campaigns against both the government and Jordan. Local Arabic-language media continues to harshly criticize the government's lackluster response and point to citizen frustration with incompetent officials and institutions as the spark for recent outbreaks of violence. End Summary

Rioters Attack Police

[1](#)2. (C) The Ma'an riot was triggered after the death of Fakhri Kreishan, a 48 year-old retired telecom official who died after sustaining injuries during an altercation with police. Kreishan was reportedly hit on the head with a baton as he tried to prevent the arrest of a fugitive wanted for check writing fraud who had taken refuge in his house. Kreishan was immediately taken to Amman for medical treatment. After the initial incident, Kreishan's family granted a three day "atwa," or truce, to the family of the police lieutenant who allegedly beat Kreishan. Traditionally, an atwa is a promise to refrain from violence until a final reconciliation can be reached between the tribes. The Public Security Department (PSD) publicly stated after the beating that the lieutenant had been arrested and an investigation initiated.

[1](#)3. (C) Kreishan did not recover from his injuries and was pronounced dead on November 14. Shortly after this news became public, violence erupted with rioters attacking a police booth and firing at the officers inside. No injuries were reported, though the rioters set an emergency vehicle

ablaze and blockaded the desert highway linking Amman and Aqaba. Intermittent gunshots were also heard in the town.

¶4. (C) Tribal leaders immediately attempted to calm tensions, but younger members of the community reportedly continued to gather on the streets the night of November 14 creating a tense environment. As of the morning of November 16, the situation reportedly had stabilized but Gendarmerie forces, deployed after the attack to restore security, continued to maintain a presence.

Interior Minister: "Non-Citizen Instigators" to Blame

¶5. (C) On November 15, the Minister of Interior had a previously-scheduled press availability to discuss plans for decentralization. However, he responded to inquiries about the recent outbreak of violence and these comments became the lead in subsequent articles. The Minister began by stressing Jordan's respect for the rule of law. He stated that PSD officers respect the rights of Jordanian citizens, but that accusations of abuse are always investigated and PSD officers can be put on trial for abuse of power. He also stated that these violent outbreaks produce victims not only in the community, but also among the PSD officers who are on the scene. Interestingly, the Minister did not address either the East Amman or Ma'an riots specifically and he did not give any details about the investigation or prosecution of the specific PSD officers accused of abuse linked to the two recent deaths.

¶6. (C) The Minister went on to say that tribal tensions were

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not to blame for outbreaks, saying that Jordanian tribes are known for their desire to achieve peaceful resolutions to conflicts. Instead, he accused "non-citizen instigators who are known to us and will be revealed shortly." He also said that these "non-citizen instigators" were using riots to cast doubt on Jordan's stability and security. The Minister says these isolated incidents do not reflect the state of the nation.

¶7. (S/NF) The King has yet to make any public statements regarding the riots or the root causes of the violence. The lack of a visible royal response closely mirrors that during and after the East Amman riots a week earlier. Post interlocutors continue to openly criticize the government's lackluster performance in dealing with the riots and anticipate that the Minister of Interior's comments will only fuel further criticism. This open criticism is a rare occurrence in Jordan.

Media Continue to Attack Government Over Riots

¶8. (C) Local Arabic-language media, especially those more critical of government policies, continue to unfavorably highlight the government's handling of the recent riots and view them as a sign of a growing gap between society and the State. Articles have specifically discussed ineffectual and a lack of citizen trust in the government to understand citizen's concerns and needs. Editorials have also called for political reforms in order for the country to better handle the real economic, social, political, and external challenges it faces. The King has not been coming under direct criticism, though attacks on appointed "corrupt" and "incompetent" government officials have been one strategy used to indirectly target the royal court. Additionally, the international media is also covering the riots and focusing on the police brutality. An article in the Associated Press, for instance, erroneously links the police abuse with U.S support to Jordan's security agencies, stating the recent events cast "a spotlight on the nation's U.S. trained security forces, that may have also been a proxy jailer for the CIA."

¶9. (C) Violence in Ma'an is usually taken seriously by local political analysts. Ma'an, populated by tribal leaders of Bedouin East Bank origin, is considered a bellwether for political, social, and economic stability. No single tribe dominates the area but, instead, several small families compete for political and social dominance. Ma'an's Bedouin backbone and tribal competitions have made it a flashpoint over the past twenty years and a barometer of East Bank public opinion. In fact, riots have given the city a reputation as a volatile center of religious conservatism. Some examples of anti-government protests in Ma'an include:

-- 1989 riots by truckers and unemployed Ma'anis protested a rise in oil prices.

-- 1996 violent protests sparked by the rising price of bread.

-- 2002 protests and demonstrations to protest the lack of state attention to rural and Bedouin interests.

-- 2009 firing of weapons in front of Gendarmerie troops during the Gaza crisis.

¶10. (C) Hassan Al-Assaf, Director of the Ministry of Interior's Residency and Nationality Department, (also from Ma'an and a former governor) told Poloffs that Ma'anis have a tendency to "speak loudly" when they feel they are not being listened to by government officials. This practice stems from a belief that they are often at a "great distance" from the "center of Jordan," according to Al-Assaf. He believes that tensions will decrease, at least in Ma'an, once citizens sense their voices and frustrations have been heard and acknowledged by GOJ officials. In this instance, Al-Assaf stated the community wants to see "justice" and the actions taken by the PSD to investigate the death should be sufficient once the initial shock of the death has subsided.

Comment

¶11. (S/NF) For the second week in a row, public frustrations have manifested in actual attacks against security personnel.

This level of protest and the concurrent open criticism in the media are rare in Jordan. What is puzzling is the fact that the Jordanian leadership does not appear to be learning

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from each outbreak of violence. After being criticized for his silence after the East Amman riots, the King continues to remain silent while the Minister of Interior failed to specifically address the riots or the status of investigations of specific PSD officers accused of abuse. This clumsy public relations response will likely increase criticism that Jordanian leadership does not understand the concerns of the citizenry. End Comment.
Beecroft